

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-15 SP-02 PRS-01 INR-07 PM-04 AF-08 L-03
EUR-12 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSC-05 ACDA-07 ISO-00
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R 200400Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY SANA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9880
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
RUQMRMXAMEMBASSY JIDDA 2694
AMEMBASSY LONDON

S E C R E T SANA 4413

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, YE, US
SUBJECT: ANOTHER OVERFLIGHT OF BAB AL-MANDAB

REF: SANA 4346, 4220 AND 4382 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY. YAR FOREIGN MINISTRY DISCLOSES MORE OVERFLIGHTS
OF UNIDENTIFIED AIRCRAFT. END SUMMARY.

1. YAR FORMIN AL-ASNAJ TOLD DCM 17 DECEMBER THAT ANOTHER
OVERFLIGHT BY UNIDENTIFIED AIRCRAFT OCCURRED OVER YAR TERRI-
TORY NEAR BAB AL-MANDAB "ABOUT FOUR DAYS AGO".

2. ACCORDING TO AL-ASNAJ HE COOULD NOT SAY WITH CERTAINTY THAT
PLANES WERE ETHIOPIAN, BUT HE CLEARLY THOUGHT THEY CAME FROM
ETHIOPIA. HE ALSO ENTERTAINS IDEA THAT ISRAELIS COULD BE
INVOLVED IN FLIGHTS.

3. AL-ASNAJ ALSO SAID THAT YEMENIS HAVE RECOVERED
ONLY "FOUR OR FIVE MACHINE GUN ROUNDS", NOT AN
UNEXPLODED BOMB, BUT THAT THESE ROUNDS WERE OF WESTERN
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ORIGIN.

4. AL-ASNAJ RAISED QUESTION OF US ARMS SALES TO
ETHIOPIA, SAYING THAT HE HAD INFORMATION THAT USG
WAS GOING TO SUPPLY F-4S RPT F-4S TO ETHIOPIA. HE
CLAIMED THAT ETHIOPIA WAS MENACE TO YEMEN AS WELL AS

SUDAN AND, MOREOVER, INCREASINGLY ALIGNED WITH SOVIETS AND PDRY. HE PRESSED DCM ON ROLE OF ISRAELI MILITARY ADVISORS IN ETHIOPIA AND CLAIMED THAT OUR MILITARY AID -- "WHICH CERTAINLY DOES NOT BUY ANY INFLUENCE IN ADDIS TODAY" -- MAY REFLECT ISRAELI PRESSURE ON USG. AT END OF EVENING HE SUGGESTED THAT YEMEN NEEDED BETTER RADAR TO TRACK INCURSIONS INTO YAR AIRSPACE, AND IN ANY CASE WAS VASTLY UNDERGUNNED AND TRAINED IN ITS ABILITY TO STAND UP TO ETHIOPIAN OR PDRY MILITARY MACHINES.

5. HE HARPED ON PDRY IDEA. PDRY WAS EVEN MORE OF A THREAT THAN ETHIOPIA, HE STATED WITH ITS IDEOLOGICAL TRAINING AND SOPHISTICATION AND NUMBER OF ITS WEAPONS, IT COULD "DOMINATE THE ENTIRE PENINSULA WITHIN FIVE YEARS". ITS LINKS TO TERRORISTS WERE OMINOUS. ITS REVOLUTIONARY IMPULSES WERE UNDIMINISHED. IT HAD MONEY FROM LIBYA, IRAQ AND SOVIETS.

6. DCM SAID HE DOUBTED STORY ABOUT F-4S BUT WOULD TRY TO GET DETAILS. IN ANY CASE, WHILE ARGUMENT FOR CONTINUING ARMS SUPPLY AT HIGH LEVELS TO ETHIOPIA WAS MUCH MORE TENUOUS NOW THAN TWO YEARS AGO, US CONTINUED TO SEND TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT TO ADDIS REGIME AS WAY TO STRENGTHEN MODERATES WITHIN GOVERNMENT AND MAINTAIN AREA BALANCE. THIS WAS CLEARLY IN INTEREST OF AREA STATES, JUST AS IT WAS TO EXCLUDE SOVIETS FROM ETHIOPIA AS LONG AS POSSIBLE.

7. DCM SUGGESTED THAT PDRY, WHILE OBNOXIOUS, HAD
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TO BE REGARDED AS LESS OF A THREAT THAN EVER BEFORE, GIVEN ITS FAILURES IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS. REGIME WAS STILL IN POWER, BUT IT HAD MADE NO RPT NO HEADWAY IN ITS PLANS TO EXPORT REVOLUTION.

8. COMMENT: WE CONTINUE TO THINK THAT "OVERFLIGHTS" WHICH HAVE REPORTEDLY RECURRED, AND MAYBE EVEN EXCHANGES OF FIRE, HAVE BASIS IN FACT, ALTHOUGH LACK OF CONVINCING EVIDENCE FROM PROFESSEDLY CONCERNED YEMENIS IS PUZZLING. JORDANIAN OFFICERS, FOR INSTANCE, WERE ASKED TO VISIT SITE AND SAW NO RPT NO EVIDENCE OF FIRING, AND NO ONE HAS PRODUCED EXPENDED ORDNANCE. SOME RESPONSIBLE YEMENIS REPORTEDLY DO NOT BELIEVE THE ATTACK STORY. WE THINK THAT THERE WAS SOME KIND OF FIRING, AND THAT THE YEMENIS, AS REPORTED EARLIER, ARE USING THIS STRANGE INCIDENT TO PUT THEMSELVES ON THE ARB DIPLOMATIC MAP, TRYING TO FORCE ARAB ATTENTION TO THE BAB AL-MANDAB AND A YEMENI SECURITY

ROLE IN ANY OVERALL SETTLEMENT PLANNING THAT MAY BE GOING ON AMONG OTHER ARABS. ALSO, AS REPORTED EARLIER, YEMENIS DEFINITELY FEEL INSECURE IN FACING RADICAL REGIMES IN ADEN AND ADDIS. THEY ARE OUT-GUNNED. THEY STILL HAVE TO DEPEND IN MANY PRACTICAL RESPECTS -- MAINTENANCE FOR THEIR MIG-17S FOR INSTANCE-- ON A SOVIET UNION WHICH IS UNHAPPY WITH POLITICAL DIRECTIONS HERE. YEMENIS ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SOVIETS HAVE LOST GROUND IN LEVANT IN LAST FEW YEARS BUT THEY SEE SOVIETS GETTING STRONGER IN HORN OF AFRICA AREA. IT MAY ALSO BE THAT YEMENI "ATTACK" REPORTS ARE PART OF EFFORT TO GET SAUDIS TO SPEED UP AERO-MODERNIZATION OF YAR FORCES. AIRDRAFT DELIVERIES AND ALL BASIC TRAINING OF PILOTS HAVE BEEN PUT OFF SEVERAL YEARS BY SAUDIS, AND WILL LAG FAR BEHIND GROUND MODERNIZATION.

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